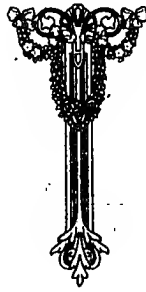


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By H. F. LAWRENCE

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KIDNAPPED

By H. F. Lawrence

Wandering through the silent backwaters of history we find many a parallelism for much that concerns us today, and I think we shall agree, it is consistent with the superficiality which has marked the Wheat Board controversy that it has at last culminated in the frenzied cry of "Sapiro save us or we perish."

It is but recently we turned our backs on a wheat board which was to be compulsory (ask Mr. W.), then next on one which was to be voluntary (ask Mr. G.) and later we make a discovery that what is really needed is a wheat pool (ask Mr. C.). . . . A musical scale of requirements, it sounds like a game of haphazard experiment in which there has been found so much enjoyment that the game must not be allowed to lag, so we summon in hot haste from California, a gentleman who is described by our, I fear too sanguine, press, as "the wizard of co-operation." It smacks of the midway of a Fair! However if Mr. Sapiro can explain to the farmers of Alberta how to unrestrictedly produce wheat and make it pay, for that is what it amounts to, we may approach under his guidance a solution of our long standing difficulty.

The year 1795 saw an attempt made to reduce the price of wheat. In this we shall discover same analogy to the vastly changed conditions of today. The then Prime Minister, Mr. Pitt, laid before the House of Commons a proposal to appoint a commission to enquire into the prevailing high prices of corn. The poor were not getting enough to eat, their bread was adulterated. Mr. Pitt remarked that it might be wholesome, but it was not good, and he proposed to regulate the assize of bread.

So in the conditions existing less than 150 years ago the people were starving and the laborers who ploughed the fields were in no better plight, for they complained that many of the wealthier farmers stored their grain to further increase its value. The hoarding of wheat was also claimed to be a detriment to the people, and that sounds familiar to ourselves today.

Those were the days when men cried to have bread cheap; today we

are hoping by methods of manipulation to make wheat dear.

This is, I am aware, putting the matter more bluntly than anything we have heard in the wheat selling controversy, and in a matter so many sided there are further issues which have not been touched upon. To take but one instance, it has not been considered whether an interference with a long established system of free marketing will fetter or advance the general interests of agriculture?

The farmers are slow to see that any form of compulsion such as Mr. Sapiro has had the courage to suggest to us, spells coercion, and is a step in the direction of a State servitude from which the individual is at present wholly free.

We must recognize that hitherto it has been within a farmers' power to turn plenty or scarcity to what profit or advantage he is able, and the farmers will be the losers and in the end no longer the masters of their business if they relinquish that right, to bring forward or keep back their commodities at their pleasure.

Mr. Sapiro's teaching is strictly communal, the broader interests of farming do not concern him. He tells us without undue emphasis that given fifty per cent. of the farmers signing the wheat pool contract, it is within their power to ruin those who refuse to do so. He does not indulge in the thin and hazy expression to which we have long been accustomed. It is a matter of complete indifference to Mr. Sapiro how many or how few succumb to this triumph of mis-called "co-operation".

We are told that it may not for some long period be possible to handle grain more economically than the middlemen are doing, which is a noticeable statement, because the wide gap existing between the wholesale and retail transaction has consistently been recognized as the most unsatisfactory feature of farm life.

The middlemen in every business are freely abused, but nevertheless they are a necessary and natural link which cannot be dispensed with and the farmer is ready to disregard circumstances which not infrequently make a grain brokers' business not

unlike his own, a highly speculative one.

But it is obvious that if the middleman's activities can be restricted, then for the public good it is clear that in that direction lies the chief road of possible discovery worth looking into, and it has this to recommend it: it can be done without interference with the farmer. An investigation, whatever its other result, would expose the truth that the more the middlemen make and the more largely they deal, the better for the grower it must be. To the consumer it matters not to whom the profit falls, he pays.

We shall be doing Mr. Sapiro grave injustice if we think he is unaware of the natural law which will have to be reckoned with, for as surely as we succeed in stimulating the price of any commodity, so just as surely we increase the volume of its production, and the same law of supply and demand must exert itself.

Mr. Sapiro is too efficient an organizer not to possess a rod in pickle for every emergency, and the matter of compulsory curtailment of production is the dark horse in his stable, which he is not anxious to have brought under discussion at this stage of the game. Mr. Sapiro may well hesitate. Any restriction of production can inflict upon society an irreparable injury from which the farmers themselves would not be excluded. It must not be lost sight of, that left to their own sound dealing, the farmers will grow wheat as long as it appeals to them as being within the scheme of profitable agriculture, and no longer. Profits which are too low inevitably reduce production, and in our case must prove a chief incentive to that variety of production which will in the end prove to be the West's salvation.

We do not overlook that Mr. Sapiro has dwelt upon the regeneration of the tobacco growers through his services. The instance of tobacco growing is as far off wheat growing as it is possible to select, nor can the tobacco growers be classed in the same category as the alert and virile farmers of the West. Tobacco growing with the cessation of slave labor became an enfeebled industry, and one most mercilessly exploited by the dealers to an extent from which we are free.

We may assure Mr. Sapiro that prosperity is securely seated in this vigorous country if the farmers will realize that a living is assured them in

ratio to their sagacity in conducting their affairs; smaller holdings are becoming necessary. We have in our midst too many men who are conspicuously land poor: farms exceeding three or four hundred acres are today a detriment to this country. Time will correct this.

True farming is mixed farming (it has nothing in common with nuts or raisins or tobacco), and Mr. Sapiro may rest assured that in spite of the Heavenly glow with which he would unfold our future, farming will still remain the most moderately profitable of any trade for the amount of capital invested, and it will continue to be the one most capable of rapid and complete recovery from those disasters to which it is subjected, and which would accomplish the ruin of any other business. The farmer who sticks to the game wins out. Ah! Mr. Sapiro it is a question whether you are as safe a judge of the conduct of our business as doubtless you are of your own. You could have rendered no truer service to the men whose lives are pledged to the soil of the west than to assure them that they must exercise their determination to bring about a discontinuance of the present most ruinous business of exporting wheat to the extent we are doing.

I cannot too often insist that there should be carried to its completion in this country the one and only purpose for which our wheat is being exported to another: the milling industry should have long been established on a scale to keep pace with a great flour and cereal export trade from this country.

There is exposed great inconsistency in the complaint of excessive railway rates and our continuing to squander millions annually on the hauling of weeds and dockage, to which we add the cost of again transporting all that is required to meet our home consumption.

It would be an incalculable gain throughout the west if the by-products of our grain remained in the country. They would in generous measure be restored to our farms, and it is there they economically belong. For the first time in the country's history oil would be reasonably obtainable to be applied liberally to our dairying and to the restoration of our lost beef industry, and it would result in finished beef and better stock throughout the country, and the western cattle trade would have a sounder footing than it has yet known.

One so wise as Mr. Sapiro is aware that much of the discontent throughout the middle west can be attributed to the cost of transportation, nor can he be heedless of the fact that we are developing a far inland territory from which three fourths of our production is carried 5000 miles to market, and if owing to prevailing labor conditions freight charges cannot be reduced, then the question arises to what extent can we ourselves curtail them? What answer presents itself other than the solution I have given you? Matters so relatively simple to the better doing of this country might well arrest the attention of a government.

They are, I admit, without the aroma of California with which doubtless Mr. Sapiro could have presented them, but I venture to add they carry with them a shrewder knowledge of conditions in this country.

Farmers of Alberta have not among their failings a reluctance to extend the hand of welcome to all creation, and to what extent that is leading to this becoming an easy hunting ground to any self-advertising adventurer I leave to others to decide.

It is well to recall that we have in rapid succession passed through the hands of one Hatfield, "a rainmaker," and of another who revelled in the role of Moses—to discover later that he is dealing with a stiff-necked people),—and today we have become obsessed by the activities of an Aaron. It does not escape our observation that all three gentlemen hail from the country which was not slow to discover that a fool is born every minute.

I would suggest to Mr. Aaron Sapiro that if true co-operation is the one thing needed, we have the outstanding example of the Kingdom of Denmark—a wholly agricultural country—In co-operative methods it leads the world, and its success might with advantage become our own to emulate.

The countryside has allowed itself to be stampeded, and from all we hear and see it has gone "Sapiro-mad."

There should be no resentment aroused by fair and dispassionate criticism of a matter so laden with grave results.

Mr. Sapiro may be efficient in all that he has hitherto undertaken, but we may well be dubious of the haste which proclaims that if anything is to be accomplished "it must be done immediately." To accomplish what? A disruption of the established system of marketing which is the outcome of

centuries of growth, and however desirable a change may be, there should be first and last a prudence exercised which refuses to be hurried. It is not a question of to what extent we may trust Mr. Sapiro: the fact cannot be lost sight of that we have some fifty odd representatives ostensibly to guide and safeguard the welfare of 67000 farmers scattered between the boundary and the Peace, and in this matter of enormous magnitude, embracing results which are incalculable, time and deliberation should be their own.

So violent is the hurry that Mr. Sapiro assures us that if the necessary funds are not forthcoming in this country there will be no difficulty in procuring all that is needed from the States. So great a testimony of "international goodwill" cannot fail to be appreciated, but it becomes us to assure Mr. Sapiro that we are determined for the present to remain the masters of our own affairs, and that there is no call for this undesirable rush to attain that, which if it be justified, will assuredly be accomplished.

He has yet to appreciate that there are no difficulties besetting a farmers' path today which are not as evolutionary in character as in the most strenuous days of our ancient calling, and what Edmund Burke, who was himself a great farmer, had to say in his correspondence with Mr. Pitt, is worthy the attention of every honest man throughout the West. I will quote it: "The balance between production and consumption justly makes price. My opinion is against an overdoing of administration, one year of such false policy may bring about mischief incalculable. The trade of the farmer must be left to its own free course, and lastly I warn you there must be no meddling with the food of the people."

Five generations have come and gone since these words so saturated with wisdom were uttered. We who are the producers of the daily bread of the people, let us see to it that no meddlesome interference jeopardizes our remaining the masters of our own affairs. We can emancipate ourselves from any tyranny and abuse which justly makes men desire the downfall of abused power, and still never resign the farmers' most ancient right to bring forward or to hold back his produce at his pleasure.

HY. FRANK LAWRENCE

Pine Lake, Alberta,

August 25, 1923.